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DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2028

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SUBJECT: BRV REACTS ANGRILY TO ONDCP DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

REF: CARACAS 0079

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Daniel Lawton,
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (SBU) The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) launched a multi-pronged response to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Director's comments that President Chavez was facilitating narcotics traffickers by neglecting to root out corrupt officials and failing to deny the use of Venezuelan runways or airspace to smugglers. National Assembly (AN) speaker Cilia Flores publicly accused the USG of trying to make "colonial slaves" out of Latin American countries through its anti-drug policies. She called Colombia "a country controlled by the United States government." During the January 20 television broadcast of "Alo Presidente," Chavez accused "the oligarchs" of Colombia of inviting ONDCP Director John Walters to attack Venezuela and called President Uribe a "sad pawn of the empire".

¶2. (SBU) National Anti-Drug Office (ONA) Director Nestor Reverol held a January 22 press conference to defend his country's progress in the war on drugs. Reverol said a 2007 United Nations report showed that Venezuela had the third highest rate of drug seizures in the world and scolded the United States for "using counter-narcotics as a political weapon." (Note: The UN report used 2005 figures, before the BRV broke bilateral cooperation with the USG. End Note) Pro-government daily "VEA" ran a one page feature story January 23 on the production of marijuana in the United States, replete with a half page growing map and bar chart, claiming that the U.S. produced more marijuana than corn and wheat combined.

¶3. (SBU) Local media also gave prominent coverage of Vice Foreign Minister Juan Valero's address at the Organization of American States on January 23, highlighting his statement that U.S. drug policy is "immoral and interventionist" and his claim that Venezuela had the most successful drug control policy in the hemisphere since suspending cooperation with the DEA. Following Valero's comments, the National Assembly announced on January 24 that they would investigate to see if there was a pattern of Bush officials going to Colombia to launch verbal attacks on Colombia, adding that these claims could be a pretext for invading Venezuela. Interestingly, only one Venezuelan daily mentioned Ambassador Alvarez's January 22 letter to Representative Eliot Engel proposing a dialogue on a bilateral counter-narcotics strategy.

¶4. (S) During a private, post-press conference January 23 meeting with DEA country attachQ, ONA Director Reverol (protect throughout) explained that much of his comments were

"just politics." The country attachQ pointed out that the ONA's own website showed Venezuelan drug seizures on a downward spiral over the last three years, while neighboring countries showed steady increases in narcotics raids. The attachQ admonished Reverol that it would not be long before Venezuelan journalists saw the inconsistencies between the ONA's claims and their own statistics. (Note: The following day, a political gossip column mentioned that the ONA used out of date statistics and the only current information the ONA had came from European countries. End Note)

15. (C) Comment: BRV officials are following a long-standing pattern of responding to international criticism by launching counter-charges illustrated with misinformation and wrapped in anti-imperialist rhetoric. End Comment.

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